



# ASSESSMENT OF FILMMAKING AS RESEARCH

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## WHAT SHOULD FILMMAKING RESEARCHERS CONSIDER WHEN SUBMITTING THEIR WORK FOR RESEARCH ASSESSMENT? HOW CAN YOU MAKE EXPLICIT THE RESEARCH COMPONENTS OF YOUR WORK?

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### INTRODUCTION

This case study is designed to support researchers to present their research for assessment and in doing so increase capacity and confidence, contributing to the growth of the discipline and improving its visibility within academic structures.

The challenges for non-traditional research outputs, such as films, have been discussed in feedback from national research assessment processes (REF (UK) and ERA (Australia)) and in statements and articles from established, new or experimental journals. There has been debate about whether a written statement is needed, or whether the practice can speak for itself as research. Glisovic et al. explore this issue by discussing how the statement is not a replacement for the practice but works in dialogue with it as additional information, like the relationship between a translated text and its original. This argument has largely been concluded, and all the formats we consider in this case study require a research statement in one form or another.

The creation of new knowledge or ideas is not always explicit in film work. In this way, representing filmmaking research adequately in a written medium is one challenge, but there are others which mean that transferring peer review from traditional publishing to screen-based publication cannot happen seamlessly.

These challenges include developing an emerging discipline in a traditional academic environment, creating an output that is difficult or expensive to revise, difficulties of creating anonymity where the researcher may be featured or named in the film, a shortage of experienced reviewers, and a perceived lack of established methods and standards by which filmmaking research might be evaluated. There may also be tensions between submitting a film for review and requirements, needs or wishes to exhibit it to the public, where exclusivity or rights may be an issue. Equally a film that is deemed unsuccessful in terms of public exhibition could score highly in terms of its research element (because it is innovative or experimental etc.).

This case study will focus on research assessment within three different environments – for publication (of an audio-visual artefact), in national assessment processes and for academic awards and prizes. (Film festival selection is often referred to as a proxy for academic peer review, however criteria for festivals vary and research is not usually a key component). By demonstrating the importance of review for filmmaking research we hope to inform and encourage filmmaking researchers to take an active role in the processes of review.

# WHERE TO BEGIN

A first step is to ensure you know what definitions the review process you are preparing for is operating with, and what 'research' means to those you are addressing.

## DEFINITIONS AND CRITERIA: ASSESSMENT

For the REF, research is defined as 'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared...' It includes '...the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights.' Here the inclusion of the phrase 'effectively shared' is important as it might require some standard of communication with peers or the public, of the research insights from filmmaking. For ERA, research is 'the creation of new knowledge and/or use of existing knowledge in new and creative ways so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings'.

A second step is to address the criteria by which the research submission will be assessed. For example, for national assessment processes the criteria generally consist of 'originality, significance and rigour'.

## RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

### TRAILS

**Year:** 2013 **Duration:** 24.51 mins

**Director/s:** Wyn Mason **Cost:** £2,500

**Funding source:** Self-financed, University of South Wales (in-kind)

**Distribution:** Screenworks: [www.goo.gl/xy3b6z](http://www.goo.gl/xy3b6z)

**Synopsis:** A middle-aged man has lost his enthusiasm, he simply goes through the motions of living while something inside of him has frozen. On a visit to his aging parents in West Wales with his son he revisits old childhood haunts and begins to re-connect with a lost sense of wonder.

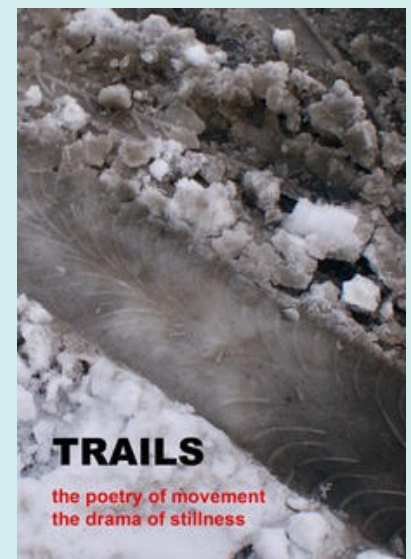
#### Outcomes of assessment process:

Mason submitted *Trails* to Screenworks and received reviewers' statements. Both film and research statement were revised in response to the feedback received and resubmitted for publication. After revision and publication Mason submitted the film to the REF, taking into account guidance from the reviewers' comments.

Specifically, revisions for the work included the idea of using 'cyghanedd' (roughly translated as 'harmony') as a structural device, i.e. repeating the entire soundtrack over the second half of the film. The incorporation of this device improved the piece in terms of its overall artistic quality and in terms of its original contribution to knowledge.

**REF statement:** *Trails* falls into the category of aesthetic research where film 'work is driven by an experimental drive to find new ways to say new things' (Dovey, 2009). It sits within the sub-genre of poetry-film, which seeks to generate meaning through the creative combination of poetry and film. *Trails'* research value lies in its attempt to explore formal ways of creating a synthesis of poetry and film beyond juxtaposition, so that film form echoes poetry forms.

The film is structured in two parts, with the first half's soundtrack repeating in its entirety in the second.



The images are different, as the characters continue their journey, but are accompanied by the first half's soundtrack: poetry readings, music and sound effects.

This form reflects the Welsh poetic discipline of *cynghanedd*, which is an ancient method, still used by contemporary poets, of creating harmony within a line of poetry, where the sounds of the first half (patterns of stress, consonants and internal rhyme) are mirrored in the second, divided by the line's central pause. Within the context of this piece, the form complements the film's theme of rewriting past narrative. The repeated soundtrack aims to trigger the viewers' memory, creating a certain layering effect, as images of Part 1 are recalled whilst viewing Part 2. Connections are evoked between various sets of images, functioning as an internal rhyming device, augmenting poetry-film's ability to generate 'associations, connotations and metaphors neither the verbal nor visual text would produce on its own' (Wees, 1999:1).

## DEFINITIONS AND CRITERIA: PUBLICATION

For publications, the criteria are established by the journal according to its theme and interests and should be available and accessible. It is also useful to get further clarification by reading the instructions or guidance given to peer reviewers.

*Screenworks* for example has a submission form including questions such as 'What were you trying to achieve?' 'What work already exists in the relevant fields of practice?' 'How do you expect to be able to advance on work that already exists?' as well as allowing scope for researchers to nominate their own criteria for assessment and use novel ways of identifying the research in their work. *Sightlines* instructs peer reviewers to consider 'How does the submission expose practice as research?' in particular examining 'Is there evidence of a particular question, issue or problem that is explored? Is there evidence of innovation (in form or content for example)? Is the work contextualised within specific social/artistic theoretical fields? Is there evidence of new knowledge, interpretation, insights or experiences? The journal *Open Screens* requests: 'an 800–1,500 word research statement, which must describe the outcomes and application of the filmmaking research, outlining how the film makes a substantial contribution to knowledge and understanding in the field.'

## RESEARCH PUBLICATION

### CAMREX

**Year:** 2017 **Duration:** 13 mins

**Director/s:** Mark Chapman

**Cost:** £3,000

**Funding source:** Self-funded, Northumbria University, British Council travel grant.

**Distribution:** 8.40 films



Published by *Screenworks*, vol.7, June 2017: [www.goo.gl/esGiz9](http://www.goo.gl/esGiz9)

**Synopsis:** *Camrex* House is a notorious homeless hostel that for 40 years has upheld a fearsome reputation. Its skewed, in-house morality perpetuated by men with complex histories. Based on interviews with hostel residents, *Camrex* constructs a series of unflinchingly visceral sequences that reveal a hidden world of untold stories.

This film is an output from Chapman's PhD., a documentary about life in a homeless men's hostel, which explores the use of documentary as a means of visualising the interior life of its contributors. The reviewers noted the strong correlation between the aims of the statement and the accompanying film. Chapman identifies the theoretical underpinnings for his research, a practice context for his past and present work, and a gap in knowledge and practice arising at the boundaries of genres and

approaches. He terms this the 'documentary interior' and sets out to investigate the possibility to render this through practice. He describes his filming methods and techniques, and how these supported his original aims and why they offered something different from typical documentary modes of production. Chapman discusses how technological developments influenced and shaped the conceptual development and vice versa, and engagement with a wider audience is demonstrated by the number and quality of the film's screenings.

## DEFINITIONS AND CRITERIA: AWARD

In terms of academic awards and prizes, the AHRC Research in Film Awards, asks judges to consider how the submitted films bring new research to wider attention, exemplify excellence in the dissemination of research findings, highlight the value and importance of research in the arts and humanities and the clarity, accessibility and coherence of the film and in particular the ways in which it conveys complex ideas and research questions. The British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies (BAFTSS) invites researchers to submit a research statement assessed in terms of evidence of originality, significance and rigour and contribution to new knowledge and understanding in your chosen field of practice. There are other academic awards including Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) award and Learning on Screen from the British Universities Film and Video Council, which are largely pedagogically focused but which can be relevant for filmmaking research.

# SUBMITTING A FILM AS RESEARCH

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In all three environments, the film output itself is submitted, either in its entirety or as extracts, alongside complementary written information. This may take the form of a statement and/or an accompanying portfolio.

## STATEMENTS

For example, relatively short statements (300 words) are required for the REF and the AHRC Research in Film Awards and for ERA (2,000 characters). These statements must clearly, accessibly and coherently evidence a set of complex research ideas and questions. For the journal *[in]Transition*, a 300–1,000-word statement that articulates the research aims and process of the work as well as the ways in which those aims are achieved in the audiovisual form is required. *Screenworks* requires a statement of up to 2,000 words covering the specific topics of research question, context, methods, outcomes (in the field), dissemination and impact. For the BAFTSS award an accompanying statement of up to 2,000 words should include 'detailed documentation of the research rationale'. The research statements for ERA must address: Research background, Field, Context, Research aim, Research contribution, Innovation, New knowledge, Research significance and Evidence of excellence.

## PORTFOLIOS

In relation to other accompanying material, for the REF a digital or physical portfolio can be supplied, while the *Journal for Artistic Research (JAR)* requires submission via an 'exposition' which combines text, image, film, and audio material on expandable web pages. These multimedia packages/portfolios must provide information about the research process and/or content. For the REF, this should cover 'research imperatives and research process' through descriptive and contextualising information. The *JAR* multimedia submission should expose artistic practice as research, going beyond simply documenting, describing, or writing about work. It must engage with questions and claims about knowledge within practice. For the BAFTSS award a portfolio can be submitted, offering a 'route map' to the practice as research. The portfolio is intended to enable nominees to point towards the wider research context and other supporting documentation, such as websites, blogs, published articles, and conference papers which may support the practice in identifying research significance.



Panel feedback from the REF acknowledged the importance of creating a good portfolio (see Box 1 for details), especially in the light of the volume and variety of work submitted for review. They noted that in many cases the inclusion of portfolios to 'support and contextualise the research' was 'essential', and in successful cases, submitting units had systemically created portfolios that had 'clarity, relevance and depth'.

## HOW TO DO IT

What are the requirements of supporting research documentation and what should be considered to do it well? Primarily consideration must be given to the intention of the supporting piece, and efforts made to address the criteria. In some instances, different headings are suggested or required, such as research background, research contribution, research significance. In other situations, the criteria are more general such as ensuring researchers locate the material in an academic context.

## PANEL D REPORT: P99

"The best outputs were presented as portfolios or with supporting information about overriding research questions that clearly located the practice and an individual's specific contribution within academic contexts."

## RESEARCH AWARD

### LOVE IN THE POST: FROM PLATO TO DERRIDA

Winner of BAFTSS Practice  
Research Award, 2016

**Year:** 2014

**Duration:** 80 mins

**Director:** Joanna Callaghan

**Cost:** £100,000

**Funding source:** AHRC, University of  
Bedfordshire, University of Kingston,

University of Sussex, Heraclitus Pictures, Crowdfunding

**Distribution:** DVD/ Bluray, Heraclitus Pictures. Online, Kanopy



**Synopsis:** *Love in the Post: From Plato to Derrida* is inspired by the book *The Post Card* by Jacques Derrida. The film plays with fact and fiction, weaving together the stories of a scholar of literature and a film director, alongside insights from critics and philosophers.

**Research:** This feature film is the fourth in a series of films produced from 'Ontological Narratives' a research project operating between 2007-2014, supported by grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The goals were to invigorate philosophy through a new approach to its enquiry (practice as research) and to bring new audiences to its content (through using fiction). Associated outputs from the fourth iteration included five short films, a book, two journal articles, and over 20 papers and presentations. For the BAFTSS award judges consider the film, alongside a portfolio of evidence and commentary. The award success is linked with its trajectory as a longer term research project which demonstrated how questions, approaches and outputs developed and expanded through the making of the film(s) and evidenced a sustained investigation into filmic and philosophical production. With its mix of drama, art film, documentary, experimental and essay film, the film, according to the judges, 'manages to enact the theoretical concerns explored in Derrida's original text, via the practice / experience of watching the film' (2016). There was clear coherence and harmony between the supporting statement and the screenwork – but judges also noted that the film itself (which was distinct from many other pieces of practice-led enquiry) stood up as an individual and compelling piece of practice-led scholarship.

## GUIDANCE TO DEVELOP A RESEARCH STATEMENT:

- Articulate a description of the question, issue or problem explored in the research.
- Explain how the research is innovative in content, form or technique.
- Provide contextual information, particularly identifying social issues the film considers, or practice context.
- Describe how the research led to new insights or knowledge.
- Identify what methodologies you chose to use, and how this relates to the question(s) addressed, and the new knowledge identified.
- Situate your research within the field as a whole, for example within theoretical or critical frameworks.

## ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

There are some experimental approaches to publication which may have beneficial contributions to make to filmmaking research development, even though they are some way away from the more formal processes required by institutional or career development priorities. These alternative approaches include open reviewing and dialogic reviewing where there are few restrictions on submission and there may be no word limits. For example, *Sightlines* allows researchers to choose whether to submit any accompanying text, it may be of any length and identify its own assessment criteria. These approaches may help develop the discipline, improve individual researcher's work, impart an understanding of how others perceive filmmaking research and the accompanying statements may prepare researchers for more restrictive assessment models. There is a need to build in to peer review processes of filmmaking research an opportunity to change or revise the output produced. There are models provided by industry for this through examples of film development labs where rough cuts of films are revised by experts and tested in front of an audience, before a final edit. A similar model is desirable for filmmaking research to improve the quality of the output and create a body of peers engaged with developing the discipline.

## FURTHER READING

- **Latest information on REF2021:** [www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk)
- **Submission guidance for ERA 2018:** [www.goo.gl/9V9mJ5](http://www.goo.gl/9V9mJ5)
- **REF Panel D report:** [www.goo.gl/ativ8t](http://www.goo.gl/ativ8t)
- **Smiljana Glisovic, Leo Berkeley & Craig Batty (2016)**  
**The problem of peer review in screen production: exploring issues and proposing solutions, Studies in Australasian Cinema:** [www.goo.gl/6Kssfc](http://www.goo.gl/6Kssfc)
- **AHRC research in film awards 2017:** [www.goo.gl/zcVf4P](http://www.goo.gl/zcVf4P)
- **BAFTSS awards 2018:** [www.baftss.org/baftss-awards-2018](http://www.baftss.org/baftss-awards-2018)
- **JAR submission guidance:** [www.jar-online.net/submissions](http://www.jar-online.net/submissions)
- **Screenworks:** [www.screenworks.org.uk](http://www.screenworks.org.uk)
- **Open Screens:** [www.openscreensjournal.com/about/submissions](http://www.openscreensjournal.com/about/submissions)

## ABOUT FRN

The Filmmaking Research Network (FRN) provides insight into the condition and dimensions of filmmaking as research. FRN aims to consolidate the field of filmmaking research by sharing best practice internationally, and developing resources. Funded by the AHRC, the FRN is a partnership between the University of Sussex (UK) and the University of Newcastle (Australia).

[www.filmmakingresearch.net](http://www.filmmakingresearch.net)

Thanks to [insightsforimpact.co.uk](http://insightsforimpact.co.uk)  
for support with this case study.





# FILM RESEARCH IN REF IMPACT

## HOW FILM AS RESEARCH OUTPUTS FEATURED IN REF 2014 AND WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED TO CREATE STRONG CASES FOR 2021

### SUMMARY

The use of film in impact case studies was widespread in REF 2014, appearing in all but two of the units of assessment (UoAs). Despite this prevalence, there are few clear examples of strong underpinning research in film that then led to strong impact in a case study. Instead, there are a variety of uses of film that stand out. Many of the impact case studies use film for research dissemination, sometimes researchers provide content for films from their research, and in a number of cases film archives are created or brought into the public domain. In this review, we are focusing on the smaller subset of case studies which do include filmmaking as underpinning research, to draw out ways in which filmmaking research can have impact and how it is successfully presented. Despite the small numbers, there are clear lessons to be learned about how to create and tell strong impact stories from filmmaking research.

Research in filmmaking lends itself well to creating beneficial impacts on society. It does this by generating creative outputs, by challenging societal norms, by raising awareness or by creating educational tools and resources. This case study is designed to help filmmaking researchers make the most of opportunities for impact development and recognition, by identifying good practice.

This analysis relies on the content of the REF 2014 case study database to provide insights into what worked and what didn't. A total of 1,347 REF case studies mention film or video, nearly 20% of the total, and by far the majority refer to contribution to filmmaking in a creative or technical sense. The ways in which filmmaking features are hugely diverse, ranging across 34 of the 36 UoAs. They vary from film used to support the conservation of fungi (Agriculture, Veterinary, and Food Science, UoA 06), using bi-sensors to improve the capture, filming, and transmission of thrilling experiences (Computer Science and Informatics, UoA 11) through to work on underexposed film archives such as the General Post Office Film archive that has now been given UNESCO protection (History, UoA 30).

### DRILLING DOWN INTO THESE CASES, WE FOUND FIVE KEY WAYS IN WHICH FILM CONTRIBUTES TO IMPACT

1. Making a film of the research as dissemination, which then leads to impact
2. Advising makers of a film or video about content informed by research, which then leads to impact
3. A non-academic filmmaker making a film informed by a researcher's work
4. Novel aspects of filmmaking (technical) influencing practice
5. Filmmaking as underpinning research which goes on to have impact on organisations or individuals

For the first four ways, film is usually used as part of the pathway to impact; the research has been completed and a film is made to apply the research or to otherwise move it into the public domain. There are differences of emphasis for those case studies which feature film as underpinning research (type 5), partly as the filmmaking begins earlier in the research cycle. Although a film can fall into more than one category, these are the case studies we will concentrate on in the following analysis.



## CASE STUDY: THE ARBOR

**Year:** 2009

**Duration:** 94 mins

**Director/s:** Clio Barnard

**Cost:** £567,000

**Funding source:** The Arbor was commissioned and produced by Artangel and financed by Artangel and the UK Film Council.

**Distribution:** Theatrical release, DVD, UK television broadcast.

**Synopsis:** The Arbor is the powerful true story of Bradford playwright Andrea Dunbar and her troubled relationship with her daughter Lorraine.

**Case study:** [www.goo.gl/RkpsfE](http://www.goo.gl/RkpsfE)



© Arbor Films Ltd.

**Impact:** *The Arbor* case study gives a strong account of impact on policymakers and NGOs by providing a new perspective on deprivation. It has impact on participants in the film and the local community, who were able to reflect on their own circumstances with new perspectives, and on the UK film industry in terms of new approaches, investment and employment. Finally, it benefits the cultural life of the UK, demonstrated through impact on audiences and critical acclaim. There is a good account of the film in terms of 'practice as research', and the different types of impact are clearly signposted with associated evidence referenced clearly. The narrative successfully weaves in quotes, as both evidence and to strengthen the story, as well as providing evidence of critical reception, social impact, and comments from high profile individuals.

## WHAT WORKED WELL

THOSE CASES THAT DID WELL, IN HIGH SCORING UNITS, INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF IMPACT:

### IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Several case studies took a participatory approach. This worked well to achieve impact when the participants were part of a clearly defined group or groups, and the filmmaking process enhanced their self expression or sense of belonging (for example made 'creative and coherent audio-visual sense of their lives' [www.goo.gl/TjZDdH](http://www.goo.gl/TjZDdH)) or where participants could see that the film changed perceptions or challenged stereotypes. To be well-regarded in terms of impact, these cases also had to demonstrate how far they had changed perceptions or challenged prejudice in the general population, specific target groups, or communities associated with the participants, as impact on a small number of participants alone, was rarely enough for a case to be scored highly.

### DEMONSTRATING INHERENT VALUE

Some case studies relied on the inherent value within a film to achieve impact on audiences. This was rarely the only element of impact claimed, but where the film was highly regarded by critical audiences and had a wide viewership, some narratives successfully made the case that the inherent value of the topic, timeliness, structure, or methodology of the film demonstrated impact on its audiences through the viewing experience alone. These narratives included evidence of very good critical reception, audience reaction from social media or interviews, and high audience figures. However even films that were critically acclaimed (such as *I am Breathing* or *The Arbor*) called on other impact achievements to build their case such as changing attitudes, opening up new areas of filmmaking, and economic outcomes.



## SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

Filmmaking in successful impact cases is rarely the only activity described. Very frequently, the showing of a film is accompanied by or supports other activities which include advocacy, outreach, training, talks, or debates, where the context of the film is used to draw out messages, lessons, or consider attitudes towards the content of the film. This may also be accompanied by the production of supporting materials such as information leaflets, social media campaigns, or other resources that link the content of the film to further outcomes such as changing attitudes, improving awareness, or changing behaviour. *My Dangerous Loverboy*, shown extensively in secondary schools, is accompanied by a 'cross media platform' containing educational resources, a music video, animated stories, links to social media and an awareness raising day [www.mydangerousloverboy.com](http://www.mydangerousloverboy.com). Other activities may also include coverage in the media that helps support change. Events surrounding the *Zanzibar Soccer Queens* documentary generated media reports that contributed to a change in sports education policy at a national level.

## IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Frequently, impact from filmmaking research is enhanced by partnership with an organisation which shares the filmmaker's objectives, or where the filmmaker can support delivery of specific aims. This might include a film being commissioned or funded by a partner, for example the NHS commissioned *The Family Legacy* on sickle cell disease and Action for Prisoners' Families commissioned the play and then the film *Homeward Bound*. Sometimes partners get involved in distribution, or the film may be used in advocacy by an organisation, such as hosting screenings for specific stakeholder groups or at specific events. In this case, the filmmaker and partner organisations work together to achieve certain impacts, with the film as a tool for change.

## CROSS CUTTING APPROACHES

Cutting across all of these routes to impact is an approach that engages with topics of contemporary relevance, looks outwards to engage with specific audiences at an early stage, and builds in perspectives of communities or organisations of relevance. Not all of these successful case studies declare a change objective from the outset, but they all reveal a consideration of the outcomes of their work from an early stage, engagement with stakeholders at appropriate times, and a willingness to participate in activities to push this forward. As the makers of *I am Breathing* say: 'the impact...was never intended to be confined to critical success' and a statement on the *My Dangerous Loverboy* website declares: '...the fundamental and most important purpose of the *My Dangerous Loverboy* film is to alert young girls about the dangers of sexual exploitation'.

## CASE STUDY: ZANZIBAR SOCCER QUEENS

**Year:** 2007 & 2008

**Duration:** 87 mins & 52 mins

**Director:** Florence Ayisi

**Cost:** £70,000

**Funding source:** Independently financed/self funding

**Distribution:** Filmmakers Library, New York, USA

**Synopsis:** A provocative portrait of Women Fighters, a team of Zanzibari women playing soccer, and defining new roles and identities for themselves, in a predominantly Muslim society.

**Case study:** [www.goo.gl/LMggKt](http://www.goo.gl/LMggKt)



**Impact:** The film has contributed to a transformation in women's football in the mainly Muslim country of Zanzibar by the attention brought to the team featured in the documentary. The film inspired the media, politicians, and organisations in Zanzibar and other countries to reconsider the role of women in sport in the country. The participants in the film, from being stigmatized, became international representatives of their country, with the support of the Minister of Information, Media and Sport, and are described as 'beacons of cultural and social reform'. Activities such as showings to specific audiences including politicians, and media coverage, contributed to a change in sports education policy. This meant girls were allowed to play football in schools, for the first time, leading to improved wellbeing and self-esteem.

# PITFALLS TO BEWARE

IT IS CLEAR THAT NOT ALL CASE STUDIES FEATURING FILM AS UNDERPINNING RESEARCH SCORED HIGHLY, AND THERE ARE SOME COMMON FEATURES OF THOSE THAT WERE NOT ASSESSED STRONGLY

## UNDERPINNING RESEARCH

Some lower-scoring case studies were not clear about the research component within the filmmaking. If there is doubt that the filmmaking contains research or that the research may not be of at least 2\* quality, then the assessors may disqualify or potentially mark down the case study. Where links between underpinning research and impact are not made clear, that can also lead to a lower score.

## IMPACT NOT DISSEMINATION

The definition of impact in the REF is 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' and so it can be helpful to consider the question 'what changed?' when identifying impact. If the change cannot be described, then the impact may be limited or the case may not score highly. Some cases describe activities rather than outcomes, such as dissemination of a film, describing screenings or detailing sales, without indicating what effect the film had on its audiences. Conducting research into audience response might be a way to mitigate this shortcoming.

## WEAK EVIDENCE

As well as relying on dissemination, some case studies assumed inherent value to their film without providing any evidence to support it. To claim that a film adds value, for example, to the cultural life of the UK, evidence would be needed of supporting views from critics, awards, or at least audience feedback from surveys, testimonials or social media etc. Claiming a benefit without evidence to support it is likely to result in a lower score.

## CASE STUDY: I AM BREATHING

**Year:** 2013 **Duration:** 72 mins

**Directors:** Emma Davie, Morag McKinnon

**Cost:** £302,000

**Funding source:** Creative Scotland, Danish Film Institute, Wellcome Trust, Channel 4, YLE, DR, MND Association, UK Film Council, University of Edinburgh.

**Distribution:** TV: Channel 4, DR Denmark, YLE Finland, VPRO Holland, UR Sweden, VRT Belgium, HSCC Israel, Estonian TV, Canal+ Poland, Baltic TV.

**Non-Theatrical:** Global Screening Day in 50 countries 21/06/13

**Educational & DVD:** USA, Canada, UK Distrify (2013) (World-wide) (all media) (digital)

**Synopsis:** A documentary follows the last months of Neil Platt, a young father with terminal motor neurone disease (MND)

**Case study:** [www.goo.gl/Z2C4cT](http://www.goo.gl/Z2C4cT)



**Impact:** An emotionally powerful film which demonstrates inherent value through film awards and positive publicity, reviews and commentary. However much of the impact comes from an alliance with the Motor Neurone Disease Association (MND) to drive awareness of the disease, through coordinated global screenings on national MND awareness day. In addition, there is evidence of changed attitudes towards the disease from practitioners such as medical and scientific staff and students and how the film renewed commitment towards their work.

# BUILDING A GOOD CASE

## THE IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE

To have a good impact story to tell from filmmaking research, it is important to articulate how the filmmaking embodies research, link the underpinning research to impact, have examples of change to document, and evidence each claim made. However, ticking all the boxes is not necessarily enough; these elements need to build into a compelling and coherent narrative. This might include quoting from relevant evidence in the text, rather than just saying it exists, providing contextual information about the topic of the film, as well as telling an engaging story which indicates to assessors why this is something they should consider has value.

## USE EVIDENCE WELL

Aim to provide corroboration for each claim of benefit you make and look to evidence impact on direct beneficiaries, such as audiences or non-academic partners including commissioners or funders. Also include indirect beneficiaries, such as the wider community. Including quotes from personal testimony is useful, whether from audience members or partner organisations, as they can speak specifically to the impact you are claiming and may be able to provide corroboration of links between research and impact. Other sorts of useful evidence include published reports by partner organisations referencing your contribution to their work, web pages or social media data, but ensure you are using evidence that shows the effect of the activity not just proof of the activity itself. The nature of impact may change over time and this can influence the types of evidence that are selected.

## INSIGHTS FROM REF PANEL 36

“Because filmmaking seeks to make an intervention into the public realm, it is often in a position to make a powerful case for impact. In making this case, however, a submission needs to bear in mind two things: first, that it also needs to make the case that this piece of filmmaking practice can be assessed as a piece of research; and second, that it has not only been disseminated in the public realm but that this dissemination has effected change of some kind.”

## KEY FINDINGS

- Demonstrate the research element in your films and a clear link to the impact. Don't rely on descriptions of your motivation, future plans or overlong descriptions of the content of the film. Focus on research questions, identification and application of methods and locating your practice firmly in an academic context.
- As far as possible provide indicators of quality. This can include awards or grants, or even selection for film festivals, where you can demonstrate some form of peer review. Critical acclaim can also be used selectively, especially from respected sources.
- Explain why the subject of the film matters, for example it could be a particularly timely or socially relevant topic. Also, who it matters to, especially if you have worked closely with organisations or partners who have benefitted. Use third party corroboration to support your claims, for example quotes from collaborators, media or commissioners.
- When describing impact, ensure you indicate what has changed. Although audience figures, the number of festival screenings, downloads or online views can be useful to indicate reach, you also need to demonstrate the effect of that activity. This might mean providing quotes from people affected by or benefitting from your work from post-viewing discussions, online comments, social media or specific interviews with key people, to collect this information.



## CASE STUDY: ACT OF KILLING

**Year:** 2012 **Duration:** 159 minutes

**Director:** Joshua Oppenheimer

**Co-directors:** Anonymous, Christine Cynn

**Cost:** £1.1m

**Funding source:** Danish Film Institute, Arts and Humanities Research Council, ZDF/Arté, The Media Programme of the European Union, University of Westminster, Nordic Film and TV Fund, The Norwegian Film Institute, The Freedom of Expression Foundation, several anonymous foundations

**Distribution:** Worldwide theatrical, television and online release.

**World Sales:** Cinephil.



**Synopsis:** In a country where killers are celebrated as heroes, the filmmakers challenge unrepentant death squad leaders to dramatize their role in genocide. The hallucinatory result is a cinematic fever dream, an unsettling journey deep into the imaginations of mass-murderers and the shockingly banal regime of corruption and impunity they inhabit.

**Case studies:** [www.goo.gl/1Aw4SU](http://www.goo.gl/1Aw4SU) **And:** [www.goo.gl/yf9pWV](http://www.goo.gl/yf9pWV)

**Impact:** Submitted as case studies by both director and producer, *The Act of Killing* is the highest profile research film made in the last 10 years. It has received huge recognition, numerous awards and an Oscar nomination in 2014 in recognition of its 'innovative approach and emotional and political impact'. Aside from its impact on audiences, internationally the film had impact on Indonesian politics and civil society through an outreach team of human rights organisations and journalists who arranged private screenings, and inspired major investigative reporting. This resulted in a change to public discourse around the historical events depicted in the film, including a report by the National Commission on Human Rights, condemning the genocide and recommending a truth and reconciliation process.

### FURTHER READING

The complete REF case study database can be found at: [www.goo.gl/LmVzzo](http://www.goo.gl/LmVzzo)

**Some other useful case studies to read include:**

**A Scottish Self-Portrait:** The Northern Lights Documentary Project: [www.goo.gl/6hAN3N](http://www.goo.gl/6hAN3N)

**Missing Out – Action For Prisoners’ Families:** [www.goo.gl/qu9XCT](http://www.goo.gl/qu9XCT)

**Sickle Cell Awareness:** [www.goo.gl/enlf5D](http://www.goo.gl/enlf5D)

**My Dangerous Loverboy:** [www.goo.gl/Vhqiek](http://www.goo.gl/Vhqiek)

**Changing Minds: Engaging with Science through Creative Documentary:** [www.goo.gl/dokMHZ](http://www.goo.gl/dokMHZ)

### ABOUT FRN

The Filmmaking Research Network (FRN) provides insight into the condition and dimensions of filmmaking as research. FRN aims to consolidate the field of filmmaking research by sharing best practice internationally, and developing resources. Funded by the AHRC, the FRN is a partnership between the University of Sussex (UK) and the University of Newcastle (Australia).

[www.filmakingresearch.net](http://www.filmakingresearch.net)

Thanks to [insightsforimpact.co.uk](http://insightsforimpact.co.uk) for support with this case study.







# FUNDING FOR FILM AS RESEARCH

Funding for film as research comes from diverse sources, although there is a core of funding from universities and research funders. Most research films use a combination of funding types, and the successful ones take a creative and holistic approach to research and production, considering different sources of funding and support for the various stages of a film's lifecycle. This case study outlines the most common funding sources, with insights into how to make the most of opportunities available.

## FUNDING OVERVIEW

The Filmmaking Research Network has surveyed 152 research films from the UK and Australia, to examine sources and types of funding. Of the 152 films in the register, 142 supplied budget details, 106 from the UK and 36 from Australia. Four commercially made films have been removed from the analysis to ensure comparability within the academy.

The total sums invested in UK films produced as research was £2.4m, with £823,540 (Aus\$1.4m) invested in Australian films. Of the films with no recorded budget the majority were short experimental films. The main sources of funding were research council funding, public funding and University funding from internal grants and awards. On average, value of funding for these films was similar in Australia and the UK, at close to £23,000 (Aus\$40,000).

## FILM BUDGETS

	Australia	UK
No. of films in the database	36	102
Total value £	823,540	2,380,605
Total value Aus\$	1,423,900	4,398,777
No of films externally funded (research councils, public sources etc.)	17	60
Value of external funding £	429,100	1,219,895
Value of external funding Aus\$	742,000	2,254,068
No of films University funded	25	66
Value of University funding £	115,082	343,240
Value of University funding Aus\$	199,000	593,514

# ACADEMIC FUNDING SOURCES

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## RANGE OF FUNDING

Academic funding sources include both internal and external funding outlined in the table and covers research council funders such as the AHRC and ESRC, or the Australia Research Council but also academies such as the British Academy and charitable research funders such as Wellcome Trust, Leverhulme Trust or NESTA.

Academic funding also includes internal university research grants to which some of the points below may apply, but they tend to have application guidance specific to their own institutions and so won't feature extensively in this analysis.

Each research funder also has its own requirements and specialties, for example NESTA has a focus on 'innovation' while Leverhulme has a reputation for supporting blue skies research. While few mention film specifically as a supported research method, it does feature somewhere in most archives of funded research. Ensuring that your research objectives are in line with the funder's priorities or approach, and that your research methods are appropriate to explore those objectives, is more important than the particular method you are intending to use. Some academic funders, for example the British Academy, explicitly state they do not support practice based research. However, it is worth considering how such organisations can fund elements of a filmmaking research project, for example pre-production research in a film archive, interviews with participants, literature or film reviews.

## HOW TO WIN FUNDING

To be successful in achieving academic funding for filmmaking, it is important to understand how your film is a research project which meets established research modes. Applications have to define clearly-articulated research questions, issues or problems, set in a clear context of other research in that area, and using appropriate research methods and/or approaches. Film is acknowledged as a legitimate output of research but also as an integral part of a research process. So, the nature of a research film is often determined by the research process and may not be fully known at the outset. This is in contrast to commercial film funding sources which emphasize at application stage, a complete, clear and comprehensive film proposal before funding. This distinction is crucial for filmmakers to understand. Research councils also expect practice to be accompanied by some account of the research process. Where creativity or practice does not involve such a process it would usually be ineligible for research funding.

## OPEN ACCESS

When considering applying for research council funding in particular, it is also sensible to be aware that considerations of open access and/or 'exploitation' are relevant. In particular there is a need to consider the extent to which the outputs that are produced, for example, by AHRC or ESRC-funded projects will be available to the research community, and other interested parties through dissemination or specific distribution mechanisms.

# AHRC FUNDING

## SCALE OF AHRC FUNDING

The largest single source of academic funding for filmmaking in the database is the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). From the register, the AHRC was identified by 13 films, via a variety of mechanisms including grant awards, fellowships, follow on funding and PhDs.

In addition, looking at the UK funded projects database Gateway to Research (the public face of UK funded research projects) reveals that between 2006 and 2017, 52 projects featured the word 'filmmaking'. Of these, 49 were funded by the AHRC, two by ESRC and one by EPSRC. 44 of the projects were research grants and eight were fellowships. Awards totaled £8.9m with average award £92,270 but the median is £26,797. Not all of these projects feature filmmaking as part of the research, some look at filmmaking from a purely theoretical, conceptual perspective, not in terms of practice.

## TYPES OF AHRC FUNDING

AHRC offers research funding for arts and humanities research through a variety of funding opportunities, from postgraduate studentships to large scale collaborative research grants, specialist training schemes, strategic programmes, fellowships and research networking.

Research funding is available through the AHRC's responsive mode schemes (funding for high quality research in any subject area within the AHRC's remit) and through research programmes and other specific initiatives.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) ran a series of funding calls under the 'Conflict Theme' of the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security (PaCCS) Research. The AHRC funded the project 'Community Experience of Conflict in Haiti: Assessing the Emotional Legacy of Civilian Deaths as a result of Intense Use of Force by UN Peacekeepers' through this call between November 2016 and June 2018, to a value of £79,752. The project, led by Siobhan Wills of the University of Ulster in collaboration with Cahal McLaughlin

(School of Creative Arts, QUB) combines socio-legal research and participatory practice, in order to 'analyse how the law governing UN peacekeepers' use of force is understood and applied in practice, and to explore the impact on local communities of the use of deadly force by peacekeepers'.

### **The researchers frame the use of film in the project:**

"The project will use participatory documentary film practices (which ensure that participants are co-owners of the project and have control over the use of material in which they appear) as a means by which people that are normally marginalised from international decision-making processes that affect them, may have their voices heard and taken into account in the drafting of UN mission rules of engagement and policy guidelines. The film will enable policy makers to consider the physical, emotional and psychological (and hence political) effects of the use of deadly force on the people living in the communities in which the UN carries out its operations."



**Diorlie Dorcius: Cité Soleil,  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti**

# PUBLIC FUNDING SOURCES

Public funding sources include Arts Council England, Film London, Creative England, British Film Institute, Screen Australia and Australia Council. These funders provide support for films that are either not suitable for commercial funding (arts funding) or need further development, support or investment for commercial purposes (screen funding).

The research component of these films is less important than for the research funders and applications will focus on creative, strategic and practical elements of your proposal. You will usually be required to submit detailed outlines of the proposed film including treatments and script, information on the structure, characters and stylistic / visual approach of the film, a detailed budget and a distribution strategy.

For screen institutions, the commercial viability of a project is of utmost importance. They support projects that will reach large audiences, that have award potential, that develop the careers of (usually established) filmmakers and actors and which showcase the UK film industry to international investors, studios and distributors.

For arts funders, there is an emphasis on projects that are often issue based, which demonstrate diversity and inclusion in their production and/or exhibition and which can reach targeted audiences who will benefit from participation in the arts. They are also interested in developing the careers of artists, curators and arts organisations through training, networking, international exchanges and supporting exhibitions.

As these are publicly funded organisations, their funding emphasis will reflect the current political, social and economic climate of the government of the time. An understanding of how these play out in each organisation's strategic goals is essential when applying for funding.

Screen Australia contributed Aus\$280,000 to the \$500,000 budget of *Baxter and Me* (Leahy, 2016, 80') a documentary about the writer/director's relationships, particularly with her dog. It was part of the Signature Documentary Program which provides production funding for projects that are 'bold in form and content'. The stories can be local or international, but they must have an Australian team with a strong vision. This program is unique in that it doesn't require a broadcaster attachment. Funded as part of \$1.15 million in funding for seven feature length documentaries through Screen Australia Signature funding program, initiating \$2.69 million worth of production.

## BAXTER AND ME

**85 mins**

**Gecko Films Pty Ltd**

**Producer:** Sue Brooks

**Director:** Gillian Leahy

**Distributor:** Ronin Films and self distributed

**Website and sales:** [www.baxterandme.com](http://www.baxterandme.com)

**Logline :** One independent woman's life with and without men, but always with dogs.



**Research Context:** *Baxter and Me* is a feature documentary exploring human relationships of intimacy with dogs. Carol J Adams has argued for a decolonization of human-animal relationships. The research question for this project was: how can fictional filmmaking techniques be employed in a documentary to promote empathy for a companion animal relationship? The project demonstrates that dramatic film techniques such as shot/reverse shot editing, aesthetically-framed shots, three-point lighting, strong colour saturation in the grade and emotive music can be employed with little difficulty to create an emotional reaction to the companion animal relationship similar to the way that human relationships are traditionally presented in fictional films. This film received \$280,000 funding from Screen Australia, and screened in the Australian Documentary Competition at the Sydney Film Festival 2016 and a further 5 festivals, local and international to date.



## OTHER SOURCES

Many research films use several kinds of funding to develop, complete and distribute films. The more formal research sources are supplemented with a wide range of other funding e.g. trusts, crowdfunding, personal loans, patronage, corporate sponsorship, in-kind funding, and private investment by production companies. There is also soft funding support that can be considered such as residencies, equipment or facilities bursaries, mentoring and training.

In-kind funding is a very common form of support for filmmaking, and this is usually related to equipment, facilities or resources, often supplied by universities themselves, collaborators or production/facilities companies. Frequently labour is supplied without charge. Sometimes filmmakers will take out personal loans or source investment from friends and contacts. Investment from private production companies is another possible source. Joanna Callaghan's film 'Love in the Post: From Plato to Derrida' ( 2014, 80') received investment from production company Heraclitus Pictures which provided executive producer expertise, accountancy, office space and networks and forfeited a production fee.

### CROWD FUNDING

Crowd funding has increasingly been seen as an attractive alternative for some films. Many filmmakers find this approach time consuming and challenging although it can lead to essential additional funds for certain elements of filmmaking, see *The Acting Class* box. Crowdfunding may work best for films with an engaging social message, or where the film has already gathered a strong following within a particular community or through social media. Filmmakers must weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different platforms, for example whether funds are released only after reaching a certain target or not, and consider what benefits investors are eligible for.

### THE ACTING CLASS

**Year:** 2017

**Duration:** 77mins

**Director/s:** Deirdre O'Neill, Mike Wayne

**Cost:** £3,000

**Funding source:** Brunel University - £1,000

Indiegogo crowdfunding - £2,136

**Distribution:** Insidefilm Network



**Synopsis:** The Acting Class is a documentary feature film that explores the causes and consequences of class stratification in the acting profession. The documentary speaks to both successful actors (such as Christopher Eccleston, Maxine Peake and Julie Hesmondhalgh) who are concerned about the obstacles to participation in the arts for the next generation of actors as well as actors trying to break into the profession now. The film follows struggling actor Tom Stocks who sets up Actor Awareness, a campaign highlighting socio-economic exclusion in the profession and a network helping other actors like himself to support each other on creative projects. The film explores the link between financial resources and success, discrimination within the industry, the link between education and opportunity, the London-centric nature of the business and the precarious nature of the work. There are important social justice considerations for individuals with acting aspirations but there are also broader implications for the capacity of film, television and theatre to represent

society in its full range. In addition, barriers to entry for actors coming from working class backgrounds may also harm the film, television and theatrical industries economically, cutting them off from product innovation and audiences, both domestically and internationally. This film aims to highlight the debate, using the words of the people most directly affected by socio-economic exclusion in the acting profession. To hear their accents, to see their gestures and facial expressions, to listen to their insights into how socio-economic exclusion works and with what consequences, brings alive recent scholarly work that has been exploring inequality in the cultural industries in general, including in the acting profession specifically.

## **CROWD FUNDING Q&A WITH DEIRDRE O'NEILL, MIKE WAYNE DIRECTORS OF THE ACTING CLASS 2017:**

### **What were the factors that led you to choose the crowdfunding approach?**

We had shot most of the production by the time we got to the crowdfunding stage. We decided to crowd fund because we needed funds to produce the DVD of the film which we could sell at screenings and online to help fund the expenses associated with travelling with the film to screenings and doing Q&As. So, the crowdfunding was for post-production mostly. By the time we began crowdfunding we had been working on the film for around 18 months and had built up a social media presence online via the Twitter handle for the film. Therefore, we already had a network of supporters and interested people who could help with both contributing to the crowdfunding and spreading the message.

### **Do you think a strong social message for a crowdfunded film is important?**

Our crowdfunding campaign was reasonably successful because a) it did resonate with many people who were concerned about the issue of inequality in the performing arts and thought that it was an issue that needed to be discussed; b) because it was essentially completion funds, it was a low risk contribution – people could be very confident that the money they donated would not be wasted and would help push the film over the line; c) because it was nearly completed, the idea was well formed and we also had some established stars in the documentary which also added credibility.

### **Any lessons for others taking this route?**

Over 7,000 people visited our site so in retrospect we should have made it easier for people to make a very small contribution, say of £2 instead of the minimum starting contribution of £10. With a smaller starting figure, we would have perhaps captured many more than just 65 backers out of all those visits and that would have pushed up the overall total, possibly very considerably.

## **ABOUT FRN**

The Filmmaking Research Network (FRN) provides insight into the condition and dimensions of filmmaking as research. FRN aims to consolidate the field of filmmaking research by sharing best practice internationally, and developing resources. Funded by the AHRC, the FRN is a partnership between the University of Sussex (UK) and the University of Newcastle (Australia).

[www.filmmakingresearch.net](http://www.filmmakingresearch.net)

Thanks to [insightsforimpact.co.uk](http://insightsforimpact.co.uk)  
for support with this case study.



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA



# RESEARCHING FILMMAKING PRACTICES

## SUPPORTING RESEARCHERS TO REFLECT ON THEIR APPROACHES

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**RESEARCH INSIGHTS GAINED THROUGH, FOR AND ABOUT FILMMAKING ENSURE THE MAKING OF THE FILM, THAT IS THE FILMMAKING PRACTICE, IS CENTRAL TO THE RESEARCH ENQUIRY.**

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### SUMMARY

'Filmmaking research' began as early as the 1950s with the creation of cinema and film studies. Research into industry filmmaking processes and filmmaking as an artistic practice emerged through the 1980s. The last decade has seen filmmaking practice establish itself as an important mode of research, alongside many other creative and professional practice disciplines. Filmmaking practice is now recognised as an approach to obtain new insights through filmmaking, for filmmaking and about filmmaking. Practice methodologies are used to design filmmaking research and this case study profiles films, their practice methodologies and their research contributions.

Filmmaking researchers conceive films with the intention that their production and dissemination will answer specific research questions. Filmmaking research is neither research as ipso facto, nor a posteriori; as claims that a film is research cannot be made after the film is completed. Hence it is critical that the research questions and choices of methodology, which describe the research approach and design, are clearly explained at the beginning of both the research and filmmaking processes as they frame new knowledge that comes through the making of the film.

Filmmakers devise specific questions about their own practice, or the practice of filmmaking more generally, and use the making of a film to answer these questions. The research emphasis might be on how a story is realised for the screen, working with and managing stakeholders including organisations, on and off camera participants and audiences.

Filmmaking research aims to reveal the complexities of a filmmaker's environment, which might include research about a project's production contexts, stories and narratives, screen cultures, participants, logistics, budget as well as the filmmakers' experiences and collaborations when making a film. New knowledge about filmmaking is acquired for filmmaking through filmmaking. Research about filmmaking is what underpins this mode to make a research project, not just creative practice or industry filmmaking.

### FILMMAKERS IN THE ACADEMY

But first let us appreciate a home truth: the work we do as filmmakers in the academy is pre-eminently the work of knowledge production rather than the work of film production. In our research ventures, the academy employs us to seek, generate and communicate fresh knowledge. We can, of course, make this fresh knowledge by making films. But there is almost always a hierarchy dictated by the academy: the films are a means; the knowledge is the end. And the knowledge, not the film itself, is the thing around which the institution conducts its calculus: how good is the knowledge, how readily identifiable, how full of impact, how significant, how 'weighty'?

(Gibson in Batty and Kerrigan, 2017, p. vi)

# FILMMAKING RESEARCH VERSUS INDUSTRY FILMMAKING

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Most filmmaking academics have had industry careers, and industry terms and practices are used in their pedagogies and their research but it would be naive to suggest that industry filmmaking is filmmaking research. It is not. Filmmaking research and industry filmmaking serve different purposes, and this can be appreciated when looking at how a research film is made. Here are some examples:

## RESEARCH FILMS MADE BY INDUSTRY

An academic researcher may commission a production company to make a film based on their research. An example of this is *Message from Mungo* (2014) where Ann McGrath, Professor of History at the Australian National University, completed research into histories of place and made a film which documents an indigenous community and their interface with scientists over the human remains on Mungo, an aboriginal site. Ronin Films was the Australian production company and Andrew Pike co-directed the film with McGrath. *Message from Mungo* is a research film because its purpose was to disseminate historical research findings to the broader community so that it will have impact. Research films, like this, may be made by educational, commercial or third sector production companies and fall into the category of interdisciplinary films as the film's narrative explains existing research findings. The production company will most probably use established filmmaking techniques which means their contribution to new knowledge about filmmaking will probably be quite limited. The film is a research film because it disseminates new knowledge based on prior research.

## RESEARCH FILMS MADE BY FILMMAKING ACADEMICS

An academic researcher may work with an academic filmmaker to make a film. The film *Stem Cell Revolutions* (2011) is a collaboration between a documentary filmmaker from the academy and a professor of Regenerative Medicine, which brings together filmmaker and scientist, to engage diverse audiences with the evolution of stem cell research. *Stem Cell Revolutions* is an example of an interdisciplinary film, where the content of the film is informed by research which then leads to impact through the making of the film and its dissemination. Films like this meet the filmmaking research criteria and therefore they are examples of both filmmaking research and research films that disseminate new knowledge based on prior research.

## RESEARCH FILMS MADE BY FILMMAKING PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHERS

Filmmaking researchers create projects that allow them to gain insights about culturally and socially topical issues, as well as developing new knowledge about specialist filmmaking practices. An example of this is in the film *The Crossing* (2017), by Shreepali Patel and StoryLab, Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University, where the filmmakers investigate the exploitation of hope and the black-market economy of human trafficking through an emotionally heightened multi-screen work.

The filmmaking practice sits at the centre of the research and as such leads to research insights gained through, for and about filmmaking. Allowing a filmmaker to gather new knowledge through and for filmmaking advances understanding and knowledge about filmmaking creativity through narratives, production, collaboration, processes and practices.



The types of new knowledge that come from filmmaking research can be culturally and socially beneficial while also providing opportunities for specialist filmmakers to reflect on story telling practices. For example, how a film's content is treated, how the narrative is created or how the technology and the crew are deployed to realise that narrative are possible approaches to filmmaking practice research. A methodology describes the research design used to gather new knowledge for any research activity whereas research methods describe how that knowledge was acquired. Methodologies and research methods are frequently conflated but have different purposes and they are not synonymous.

Practice methodologies are one of the academic identifiers that differentiate research from industry practice. Without a research question, or a methodology, no film can truly claim to contain academic research. Much like all surveys, or all experiments are not necessarily research, all films do not equate to academic research.

Filmmaking practice researchers carry out unique enquiries, they are motivated by different aims from those making a research film with industry. A non-academic production company may make a research film using academic research as the content for the film, but without academic research protocols in place at the inception of the film, it is unlikely that the filmmaking practice can be claimed as research. At the moment this is a contested space which is why more work needs to be done to identify broader trends and developments surrounding filmmaking research.

The choice around which practice methodology to use, and which combination of methods is the most appropriate for the filmmaking enquiry will depend entirely on the researcher's position as a filmmaker and what question/s they hope to answer by doing research through, for or about filmmaking.

## **QUALITATIVE AND PRACTICE RESEARCH ARE INTERTWINED**

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Qualitative research looks at the quality, condition or nature of the objects of study. Film and Screen Studies have traditionally used qualitative research techniques to conduct research about how films impact the wider world. This type of research can be focused on screen cultures, which include an audience's reception of the film or how the film reflects cultural activities and contemporary points of view. Film and Screen Studies use qualitative methods like case studies, surveys and interviews to conduct this type of research and in the last decades practice research has emerged allowing filmmakers to research what they do from a position inside the filmmaking process.

Research undertaken from a practitioner's point of view moves beyond qualitative research paradigms because it takes an insider's approach to researching their practice. Practice research is generally conducted by one person, it is a singular pursuit, though not exclusively. It is used across many areas of artistic, creative and/or professional practice. Nevertheless, it is still closely aligned with, and draws on many of the features used in qualitative research. For example, ethnography, auto-ethnography and the case study can be used for both practice and qualitative research projects.

Production Studies is an example of an approach where qualitative and practice research have been used to describe feature film production models, particularly those of Hollywood. Some Production Studies researchers are filmmakers who have focused research questions on their filmmaking practices, and thus combined qualitative and practice methodologies.

Understanding the differences between qualitative and practice methodologies will help filmmakers conduct research enquiries that are better able to describe the knowledge contributions that arise from their perspective of, and positions in, film production.

Acquiring new knowledge from a filmmaking practice perspective builds integrity and rigour about filmmaking as a mode of research, and moves it towards more accurate methodological descriptors, where the making of the film sits at the heart of the research enquiry. Allowing filmmakers to gather new knowledge about filmmaking, conducted through and for filmmaking, advances understandings and knowledge around film and screen cultures, audiences, productions, genres and creative processes.

Practice research methodologies validate the gathering of new knowledge from the filmmakers' insider position. Defined by Smith and Dean as Practice as Research (PaR), practice-led research, practice-based research, research-led practice and creative practice research, these following examples demonstrate how the filmmaking can be a way of undertaking research.

## DEFINING PRACTICE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

### PRACTICE AS RESEARCH

Practice as Research known as PaR is where practice is used as the primary method of enquiry and the results of any practice provide evidence of that enquiry. Robin Nelson, among others, provides insights into this definition and also notes that PaR does not require the use of a theory to justify the practice; rather, its strength is the undertaking of the practice, be that filmmaking, visual arts, dance, creative writing etc.

#### FILM PROFILE PRACTICE AS RESEARCH (PaR)

#### ARMAGH STORIES: VOICES FROM THE GAOL

**Filmmaker:** Cahal McLaughlin  
(producer/director)

**Format:** Documentary

**Duration:** 58"

**Budget:** £51,000

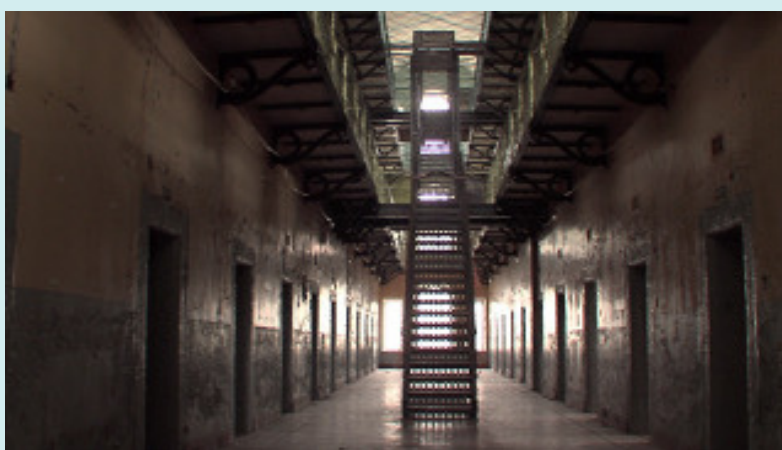
**Published:** 2015

**Earlier Project:** 'Unseen Women' at  
[www.goo.gl/ZCzLqB](http://www.goo.gl/ZCzLqB)

**Screened:** Universities of Sydney, Notre Dame, Sao Paolo, La Rioja, Galway, Foyle Film Festivals. Northern Ireland community group screenings (some open, some closed) throughout Belfast.

**Brief Synopsis:** Site specific memories of those who passed through the female prison during the Northern Irish Troubles.

**Armagh Stories: Voices from the Gaol (2015)**, is a PaR exemplar where documentary practice was used as a key research method that allowed an enquiry through the filmmaking processes of



production, post-production and exhibition which created unique co-ownership protocols where the filmmaker and the documentary interviewees co-constructed the narrative.

Cahal McLaughlin was joined by other academics working as production manager, sound recordist and editor. The PaR's methodology is detailed in the 2017 publication 'Memory, place and gender: Armagh Stories: Voices from the Gaol', that describes McLaughlin's intent as a documentary filmmaker researching the filmmaking protocols of co-ownership, inclusivity, life-storytelling through making a documentary narrative. All interviewees signed a co-ownership agreement at the time of recording and the film, as a medium, engages with the memories of the interviewees in relation to the site of the experiences. During post-production the participants were consulted and commented on rough cuts at each stage of editing.

## PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH

Practice-led research means the practice that the filmmaker reflects on during the production process and after, which leads to new understandings about practice. Practice-led research occurs through process of shaping an artwork, alongside reflection of that practice.

## FILM PROFILE – PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH

### ORCHIDS: MY INTERSEX ADVENTURE

**Filmmaker:** Phoebe Hart

**Format:** Documentary

**Duration:** 60"

**Budget:** AU\$170,000/£98,000 (ABC, Screen Australia and Screen Queensland, Queensland University of Technology)

**Production Company:** Hartflicker Moving Pictures

**View the Film:** Kanopy

**Screened:** 2010 premiere at the Brisbane International Film Festival. Won 21 awards including Best Documentary, Best Film by Popular Vote. Phoebe Hart was awarded Best Direction in a Documentary (Stand Alone) at the 2012 Australian Directors Guild Awards.

**Short Synopsis:** The film follows documentary filmmaker, Phoebe Hart, as she comes clean on her journey of self-discovery to embrace her future and reconcile the past shame and family secrecy surrounding her intersex condition.



**Orchids: My Intersex Adventure** is a practice-led research exemplar where performative, auto/biographical filmmaking led to research insights about the filmmaker's personal truth and her lived experience as someone who has an intersex condition. The film was shot on digital cameras by a small crew, who were insiders to the intersex community. Hart argues that "by having a small, 'insider' crew, the 'talent' was more inclined to openly express issues that may have been long shrouded in secrecy and stigma". This created a transformative research context that empowered the sharing of stories between the filmmakers working behind the scenes with on-camera participants. Critical theory and dialogic/dialectic methodologies were also used to take the filmmaking research into feminist and queer theory paradigms. This illustrates the blurring of boundaries between qualitative and practice research methodologies.

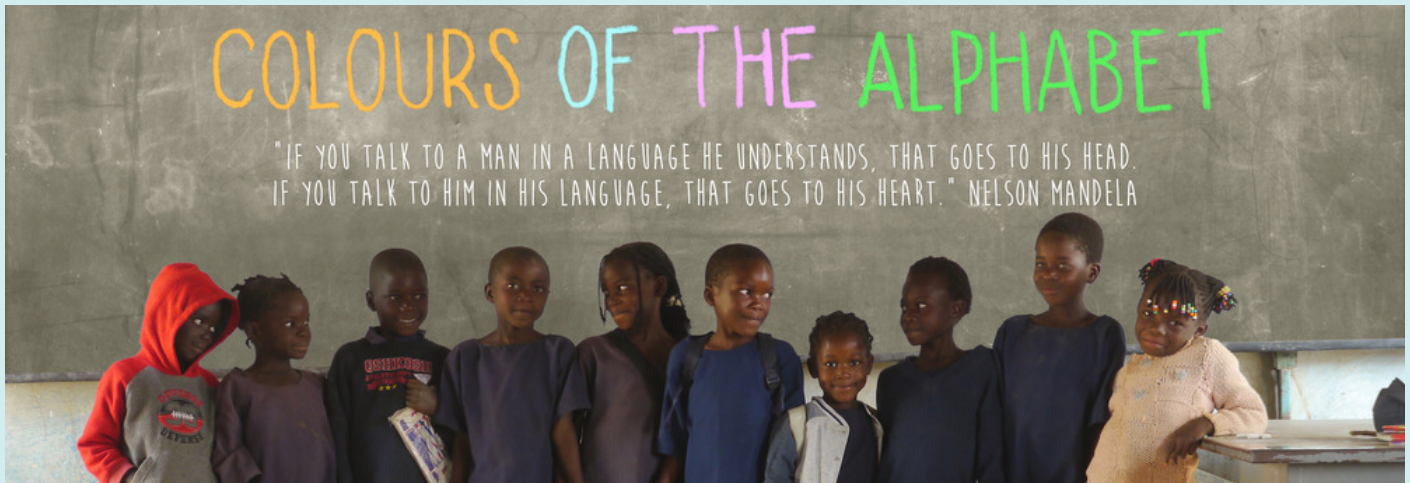


## PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

**Practice-based research** is where the creative work is the result of research. In other words, the film is the basis of the contribution to knowledge because of the knowledge that the film contains; and in some specific context the practice and the research cannot be separated.

### FILM PROFILE - PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

## COLOURS OF THE ALPHABET



**Filmmakers:** Alastair Cole (Director, Co-Editor). Nick Higgins (Producer)

**Format:** Documentary

**Duration:** 80"

**Language:** Nyanja, Soli, Bemba, English

**Budget:** £75,000 (£50,000 external, and £25,000 university)

**Production Company:** Tongue Tied Films ([www.tonguetiedfilms.co.uk](http://www.tonguetiedfilms.co.uk));  
Lansdowne Productions ([www.lansdowneproductions.co.uk](http://www.lansdowneproductions.co.uk))

**Film Website:** [www.coloursofthealphabet.com](http://www.coloursofthealphabet.com)

**View Film Trailer:** [www.coloursofthealphabet.com/watch-online](http://www.coloursofthealphabet.com/watch-online)

**Screened:** Glasgow Film Festival 2016 Glasgow (Official Selection), UK Cinema Release 2016 in 9 Cinemas and over 20 International Film Festival screenings. In 2018 it will be released as a multilingual broadcast across 49 countries in Africa.

**Short Synopsis:** An inspiring, bittersweet film on language and childhood, following three Zambian children and their families over their first year of school, and asking: Does the future have to be in English?

**Colours of the Alphabet** is a documentary film, as a creative artefact it is an exemplar of practice-based research where observational documentary, also known as visual ethnography, was used as a research tool to investigate multilingual education in Zambia.

Drawing on qualitative approaches, filmmaking was used as a research method and the final film provides the first known audio-visual recording of the Soli language in a community setting, as well as providing an exemplar for the representation of multilingual environments on film through multicoloured subtitles. In the film, Soli speaking students are observed in the classroom having to learn through the regional language of Nyanja, while having to learn English, which is Zambia's only official language, and sole language of education from grade five onwards. Interviews with teachers and parents further illustrate the multilingual context of this rural education. As a result, the final film provides an example of the implications of non-mother tongue primary education for the students, parents and teachers.

# ADVANCING DEBATES ABOUT PRACTICE METHODOLOGIES

The film profiles presented here suggest that the difference between these practice methodologies is nuanced, and what is most useful are the insights and new knowledge gained through the filmmaking research. Although in order to conduct filmmaking research a filmmaking researcher must be able to describe a research question and their methodology because it is critical in differentiating the filmmaking research from industry practice.

Some of the once important distinctions between these three practice research approaches appear to be much less obvious when looking at research outcomes, one has to ask “How useful are these generic practice methodologies when conducting filmmaking research?”.

These practice descriptors have been in place for more than two decades and perhaps they should be updated now there is a body of filmmaking practice research that can be critically reflected on. Researchers in other disciplines frequently adapt existing methodologies, they re-name and re-work them, so they are more appropriate to a discipline and can accommodate new ways of doing things and new understandings.

Research approaches used for filmmaking practice mature naturally so an apt descriptor can emerge. Screen Production Enquiry, for example, is an emerging methodology from Australia. Its focus is on screen production/filmmaking practices that allow filmmaking to be used as a research method. There may be other practice methodologies that can help advance these disciplinary debates, to eliminate the need to select one methodological descriptor over another, so that it is possible to consolidate the activity of research *through, for and about* filmmaking practice.

## LIMITATIONS OF PRACTICE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

- Practice research methodologies can be generic and may result in generalisations about practice that do not advance filmmaking knowledge.
- Practice research has frequently been critiqued for being too subjective. Ways to defend this are to use a combination of research methods to support researchers’ knowledge claims and reflections and observations of their practice drawing on filmmaking participants’ experiences.
- Generic practice methodologies might eventually be replaced with domain-specific methodologies that speak to the specificities of, in this case, filmmaking practice.

## BENEFITS OF PRACTICE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

- Naming the research question, methodology and methods at the outset of the project will make transparent the value of the filmmaking research, distinguishing it from industry practice.
- Filmmaking researchers can be participants, either as filmmakers, or by appearing on camera. Accommodating this ‘insiders’ position allows the filmmaker to research their practice based on their participation in the filmmaking process.
- Practice research can focus on the creation of a film’s narrative. This can include other research participants becoming co-owners and co-collaborators in the films.
- Film genres, such as documentary, lend themselves to practice methodologies where lived experiences can be filmed, to foreground truth and authenticity.
- Multiple types of research can be carried out through the making of the creative artifact. For example a screenwriter and a cinematographer might collaborate and research their collaborative practices in the making of the same film.

## FURTHER INFORMATION:

Batty, C. & Kerrigan, S. (2017) *Screen Production Research – Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Crofts, Charlotte (2007) *High Definitions: Articulating Media Practice as Research*, MeCCSA Postgraduate Network – *Minding the Gap*, University of Oxford.

Kerrigan, S. & Callaghan, J. (2016) The filmmakers' research perspectives: an overview of Australian and UK filmmaking research, Refereed Proceedings: Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association Annual Conference.

Nelson, R. (2013) *Practice as Research in the Arts, Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

## CONTENT SOURCES:

Candy, L. & Edmonds, E. (2011) The Role of the Artefact and Frameworks for Practice-based Research. *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*. Biggs, M. and Karlsson, H. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp120–138.

Cole, A. (2016) Documentary Film as a Research Tool: Exploring Schooling for Modernity in Rural Zambia in Bell, D. (ed), *Mind the Gap: Working papers on practice-based doctoral research in the creative arts and media*, Belfast: Distillers Press, pp28–37.

Gibson, R. (2017) Forward: A Cognitive Two-Steps in Batty, C. & Kerrigan, S. (2017) *Screen Production Research: Creative Practice as a Mode of Inquiry*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hart, Phoebe (2013) Orchids, intersex and the auto/biographical project. *Studies in Documentary Film*, 7(1), pp. 79–91.

Hardie, A. & Blackburn, C. (2011) *Stem Cell Revolutions* [www.stemcellrevolutions.com](http://www.stemcellrevolutions.com)

Hart, Phoebe (2016) Writing characters with intersex variations for television. *Journal of Screenwriting*, 7(2), pp. 207–223.

McLaughlin, C. (2017) Memory, place and gender: Armagh Stories: Voices from the Gaol. *Memory Studies*, 1–14, September 25, 2017 [www.goo.gl/Krnk1K](http://www.goo.gl/Krnk1K)

Patel, S. & Ruskin, A. (2017) *The Crossing* [www.vimeo.com/229111705](http://www.vimeo.com/229111705)

Pike, A. & McGrath, A. (2014) *Message from Mungo*, Documentary Film, Canberra; Ronin Films.

Smith, H. & Dean, R. (2009) *Practice-led Research and Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

## ABOUT FRN

The Filmmaking Research Network (FRN) provides insight into the condition and dimensions of filmmaking as research. FRN aims to consolidate the field of filmmaking research by sharing best practice internationally, and developing resources. Funded by the AHRC, the FRN is a partnership between the University of Sussex (UK) and the University of Newcastle (Australia).

[www.filmakingresearch.net](http://www.filmakingresearch.net)

Thanks to [insightsforimpact.co.uk](http://insightsforimpact.co.uk) for support with this case study.

